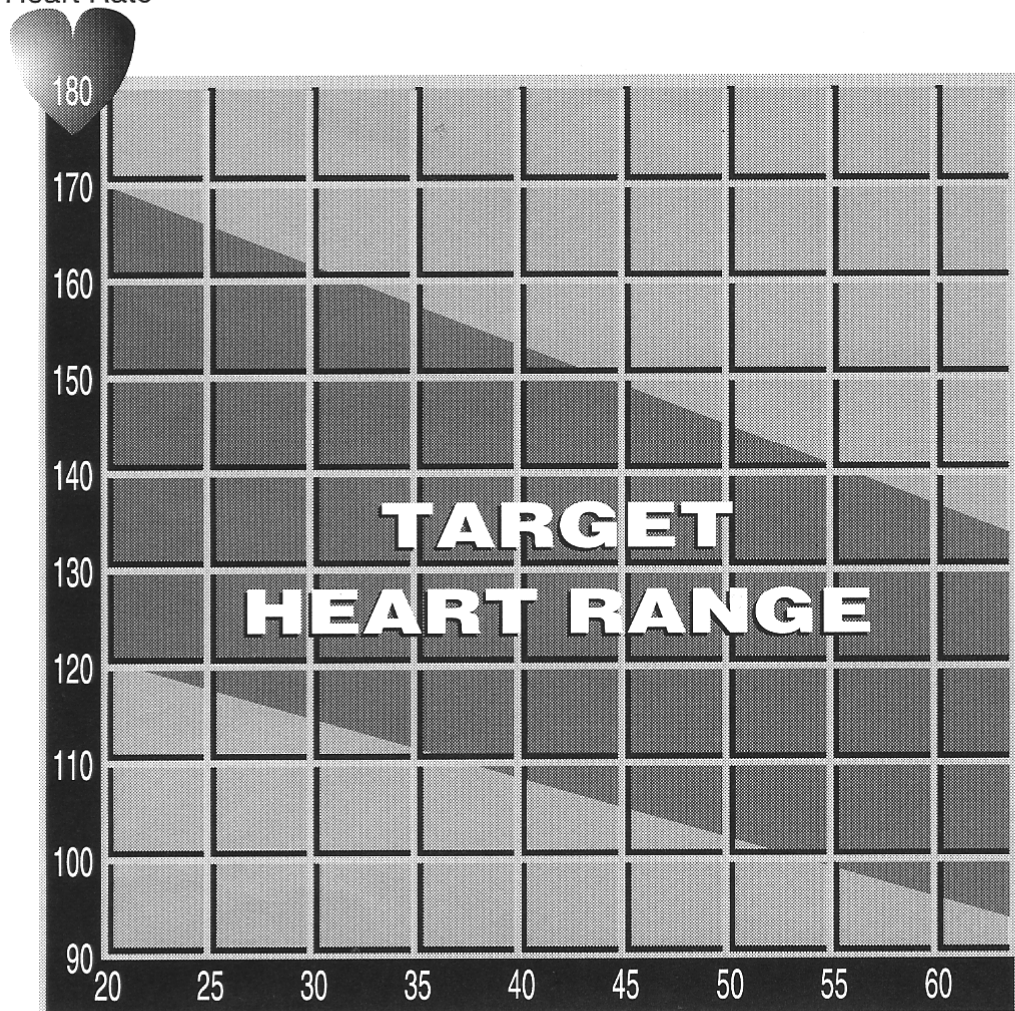


Exercise and Your Heart

Heart Rate



Fitness is a combination of muscular strength, muscle flexibility and cardiovascular fitness. Of these components, cardiovascular fitness is perhaps the most important, because it reflects the body's ability to release energy. Improving your cardiovascular fitness increases your supply of oxygen and your energy and can lead to prolonged endurance and optimum performance. By conditioning your cardiovascular system, you can also decrease your risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and other life-threatening diseases.

Aim for the low range of your THR when you first begin your fitness plan. Gradually work up to the higher range as you become more physically fit. However, if you are a smoker, suffer from a chronic medical condition or have a personal or family history of heart disease, check with your healthcare professional before starting any exercise program.

Age

The Conditioned Heart

The normal unconditioned heart beats at a rate of approximately 70 beats per minute at rest, or about 100,000 beats a day. The well-conditioned heart can actually beat as few as 40 times a minute at rest, or approximately 58,000 beats a day. In short, a well-conditioned heart conserves energy. It can supply oxygen-rich blood to the rest of the body with half the effort of an unconditioned heart.

Aerobics for Heart Health

Since the heart is a muscle, it can become bigger and stronger through exercises that progressively increase the body's demand for oxygen. This type of exercise is called "aerobic," which means "with oxygen." Aerobic exercise involves steady, continuous motion of the large muscles, which places a large and continuous demand on the heart.

Aerobic activities—walking, running, swimming, cycling, aerobic dance, etc.—should be intensive enough to raise and sustain your heartbeat to a target heart range, or THR (60–85 percent of its maximum capacity), for 20 to 30 minutes. (See chart.) For optimum benefits, exercise aerobically within your THR for at least 20 minutes at least three times a week.

The End Result

A well-conditioned heart, like any muscle, is stronger and more efficient than average. By exercising within your target heart range for 20 to 30 minutes three to four times a week, you can condition your heart, enjoy the benefits of a fit and healthy lifestyle and reduce your risk of life-threatening diseases.

